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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Congress, Meet the SS-X-25

Soviet missile rattling, much in evidence lately, Sunday took the form of a warning by Defense Minister Ustinov that an increased number of Soviet A Subs are cruising off U.S. shores. Contrast that with a vote by the U.S. House last week to halve production of the MX missile—and build none at all if the Soviets simply show up at arms talks between now and next April. In short, "Please return to the arms negotiations, or we may defend ourselves."

Perhaps Mr. Ustinov's threats will buck up the Senate when it takes up the MX. But obviously U.S. nuclear deterrence is in trouble. The House has not been talking about replacing the MX with a better system, but about killing it outright. Its final language was a "compromise" heading off that outcome.

Congressman Les Aspin, author of the compromise, seems to believe that the biggest U.S. strategic problem is to prove its "sincerity" to the Russians. Missing from this view is any recognition that arms talks have not deterred the Russians from anything they have wanted to do to try to intimidate the U.S. and Europe. If a treaty stands in the way, they simply violate it.

Pictured in this column is one of the recent discoveries of U.S. surveillance satellites, reproduced from the Pentagon's latest booklet on Soviet military power. Dubbed the SS-X-25, it carries three warheads capable of reaching U.S. cities. Its main feature is disguisability. A network of rail tunnels and concrete highways will allow the 200 SS-X-25s to be built between now and 1986 to be moved about and hidden in shacks like the one pictured. Any number of cheap shacks can be dotted around the countryside to give the missiles concealment.

Also being tested is a giant solid-propellant ICBM, capable of carrying 10 or more warheads. Solid-fuel ground tests are distinguishable from liquid-fuel tests, and the CIA has identified two such tests near Biysk.

Both the SS-X-25 and the unnamed giant are violations of the SALT II treaty the U.S. has undertaken to observe (even though it was not ratified by the U.S. Senate). The treaty allowed the Soviets only one new ICBM, the SS-24. And it explicitly said that any missile changed from liquid to solid fuel would be regarded as a new missile.

Rep. James Courter of New Jersey is asking why the White House has been so reluctant to detail Soviet arms-agreement cheating. Congressmen were given only a short briefing and a fact sheet on a 275-page report discussing what the U.S. has learned on this subject. When Mr. Courter asked for more information, the State Department replied that the SS-X-25 was still in "development" and hence not a pressing security risk.

One reason for secrecy may be that the report describes the fuzzy arrangement under which Mr. Reagan promised not to "undercut" SALT II so long as the Soviets show "equal restraint." These arrangements apparently encouraged the Soviets to think that they could ignore "obsolete provisions" of SALT II, such as, hold your breath, the missile ceilings. At the most recent meeting of the standing talks on arms compliance, the Soviets argued that any restraints on the SS-X-25 are simply among those "obsolete provisions."

Meanwhile, the treaties continue to inhibit U.S. developments. The design of the MX has been changed, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, to conform to SALT II guidelines on throw weight. This year, the U.S. will chop up two more Polaris submarines to keep under the SALT ceiling. Identifying markers are being added to U.S. bombers carrying cruise missiles, to meet SALT II verification standards. Congressionally mandated funding to deploy up to 100 stockpiled Minuteman missiles has not been spent.

Even more significantly, the problems of the MX program itself can be traced to arms treaties. Congress has been ambivalent about the missile because of the impracticality of the "racetrack" mode of deployment—moving MXs about and using some silos as decoys. But the U.S. hesitates to do the same thing cheaply, as the Soviets are with the SS-X-25, because it would make arms agreements more difficult to verify. So it has decided instead to build some MXs with no method of concealment.

Several pro-defense senators, led by Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming, may vote against the MX unless the administration comes up with a better means to defend it from Soviet attack. A point defense costing \$1 billion to \$5 billion would fill the bill. But despite Mr. Reagan's "Star Wars" research program, the administration is reluctant to break out of treaty restrictions on anti-ballistic missile defense systems. Of course, the Soviets are also violating this treaty with their ABM radars.

How do these things affect Soviet willingness to engage in serious arms control talks? The answer is apparent. They have zeroed in on the one area where the NATO allies have shown toughness, the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe, hurling threats and describing Mr. Reagan as a superhawk. They recognize that arms treaties do not stop their arms programs, only ours.

